

America: The story of Us

NEW YORK, US: In 2008, Bank of America (BAC) was the leading financial services brand according to several sources. With the financial crisis and economic downturn, BAC sustained significant brand damage via negative association with the acquisitions of Merrill Lynch and Countrywide, as well as the bank's subsequent receipt of federal funding.



In 2009, all major brand health metrics hit a low point. In early 2010, BAC saw some modest improvement, but the majority of brand metrics were stagnant according to its proprietary brand health tracking research. Negative media coverage was pervasive, contributing to consumer antipathy toward all banking institutions, particularly toward BAC. Competitors JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo were enjoying quicker brand recoveries and BAC needed to chart a path toward brand revival; but do so in a way that overcame consumer indifference or worse dislike toward BAC and its messaging. BAC's objectives were to re-set the dialogue about what kind of a company it is, communicate what it stands for and drive profitable revenue growth.

BAC has a rich, 200-year history in America. Through a legacy of financing of - and investment in - the American economy in the defining moments of the nation, the Bank's continued commitment to Americans' shared prosperity has moved, and continues to move America forward. BAC had a great story to tell creating an ownable space for the brand.

Economic recovery clearly an issue

Economic recovery was clearly an issue that resonated with the American public; and at its core, it was an emotional one. To change the perception that BAC was part of the country's financial problem into the belief that it was part of the solution, the Bank would need to forge an emotional connection with consumers.

Building on the prevailing insight that BAC stood for opportunity throughout its history, the idea was to tell a story, via content, of how Bank history is closely intertwined with the history of America. This insight was connected with the History Channel miniseries, *America The Story of Us*, early in program development. This programming was as an ideal environment to tell BAC's story with a trusted media outlet, where our target is naturally in a history consuming mindset.

Our strategy was to demonstrate the role BAC has played throughout history, but also to connect overtly to whom the Bank is today, creating an even balance between the past and the present. Rather than air ads, the Bank used the programming environment to provide additive historical content to the viewer content that happened to be about BAC's role in building the country. BAC aimed to illustrate its legacy of enabling opportunity by investing in the people, communities and businesses that have then gone on to build America a ripple effect of opportunity, so to speak. Moreover, the brand aspired to deliver this message in a way that was positive, energetic, inclusive, authentic and engaging.

Content was core

The core of this partnership was content, which came to life in multiple touch points across paid, owned and earned assets.

Within the 12-part *America The Story of Us* series, The Bank of America delivered bite-sized, immersive stories featuring itself as an unsung hero of American progress. 12 two-minute, mini-documentaries were created that expanded on the stories of each episode, using a similar look and feel of the program itself. Each content piece existed in place of a commercial pod to create a fluid transition between the stories told in the episode and those of BAC, appearing seamless to the viewer. This approach created DVR-proof content - additive to the series rather than interruptive - that was also integrated into VOD replays, online video and cinema.

Bank of America also built on-air and mobile elements that drove viewers online for a deeper experience, including a customised quiz and all of the mini-documentaries. Co-branded ads directed consumers to the BAC Heritage website, which itself was further developed to house all partnership content and other historical matter relevant to this effort. Custom DVDs were created specifically for BAC employees and key clients.

Bank-owned assets were leveraged to drive tune-in to the TV series, showcase the mini-documentaries, and build employee engagement. Specifically, BAC used its branches, website, Heritage Centres, events and even their New York Times Square Jumbotron.

We connected corporate communications groups from History Channel, BAC and their agencies to generate awareness, leverage the partnership to tell a broader narrative, and deepen relationships among top-tier press.

Results

After the *America: The Story of Us* airings, BAC saw brand perception gains:

- +42% increase in trustworthiness
- +50% increase in favourability
- +54% increase in consideration

This effort had an impact on brand image metrics:

- +25% increase against
Has a legacy of fuelling the country's economy and enabling progress

- +20% increase against
Committed to helping the people and communities in America overcome obstacles

- +20% increase against
Has a vested interest in helping our country move forward by solving the problems of today

Via custom commissioned neuroscience research, we found that BAC's custom content in a contextual environment drove effectiveness and emotional engagement, exceeding norms across all key metrics by +29% to +57%.

Media elements delivered +183% value versus cost.

BAC accomplished powerful audience retention, with the mini-documentaries holding onto 96% of the program audience, a

lift of +10% over other ads in the series effectively making the Bank's message DVR-proof and demonstrating the value of contextual content in isolated pods.

This campaign was shortlisted at the 2011 Festival of Media Awards in the 'Media Effectiveness: Engagement' category.

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